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SHAD FISHING WITH A POUND NET

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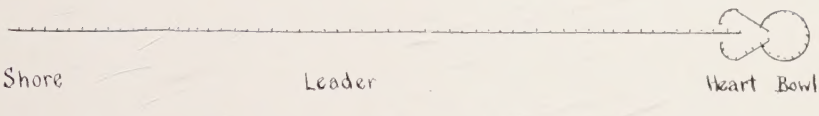

In an earlier issue of the *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* an account was given of the operation of a shad fishing pier in the lower Connecticut River. In this method of fishing, a purse seine was carried across the River from the pier at night on the incoming tide and drawn back in a downstream sweep, making a loop with the net which enclosed any fish which had run upstream against it.

A second method of shad fishing in the River was drift netting, which is still practised to a limited extent. The net, supported by floats, was set across the River at night on the incoming tide and was allowed to drift upstream, followed by the drag boat. At the end of the drift, as the net was taken aboard, the fishermen took from it the fish which had been caught in its meshes. The net used in this type of fishing was a gill net with the meshes of such a size that a fish could put its head through but could not withdraw it, since it was caught by the gills.

The third method of shad fishing was designed for fishing along the shores of the Sound outside of the River, and the net used was a pound net.

The Rev. Edward M. Chapman, in his book *New England Village Life*, described in a delightful manner all three of these methods of fishing as they were practised at Saybrook in his youthful days.

The Connecticut Historical Society has in its collection the diaries of William B. Tully, of Old Saybrook, for the years 1879 and 1882. Tully did some farming and a little job printing, and was a partner in the operation of a pound fishery at Fenwick, just west of the breakwater. His diary reveals so many details of the daily operation of a fish pound that it seems worth while to extract from it a story of a season's fishing to supplement the picture which Mr. Chapman has given us.

In order to understand the story of a pound net, one must know what such a net is and how it operates. It differs from the other nets in being a fixed net, which stays in position throughout the fishing season. It is supported by stakes driven into the bed of the Sound.

Beginning at the shore, the first section of a pound net, the leader, runs

straight out for a considerable distance to the pound. The pound is composed of two parts,—the heart, so named because of its shape, which guides the shad into the second part, the bowl or trap. The bowl is the only part of the net which has a bottom. This can be lifted to the surface by tackle on the poles, so that the fish can be dipped out with a scoop net or dumped directly from the bowl into the fishing boat.

The fish moving along the shore on their way to the River, seeking the spawning beds, encounter the leader and naturally turn away from the shore to go around it. They meet the open lobes of the heart and are directed by them into the bowl or around in a circle so that most of them finally enter the funnel of the bowl from which there is little chance of escape.

The fisheries at Fenwick were part of the original land holdings of George Fenwick. At a later date the fishing rights were divided up into sections of from one-quarter to one-half mile of shoreline. As time went on, each section acquired several owners by purchase or by inheritance. The Tully fishing began at the breakwater and ran west along the shore front of Fenwick. In 1879 there were four owners or partners, William B. Tully, Samuel Bushnell, Fred Kirtland and Frank Kirtland, operating as the Lighthouse Fishing Co.

The diagram shows the general plan of the net. In this particular case the net was long and had two traps, and was supplemented by a short auxiliary net running northwest from the end of the breakwater or "wall." The lighthouse had not been built. The regulations now prohibit the maintenance of a pound net within a certain distance of the mouth of the River, so that the "fishing place" can no longer be used.

The new year must have reminded the partners that the fishing season would come soon, for on January 17 we find Tully collecting from a Mrs. Daniels the twine that she had knit. "The twine" was the term generally used by the pound fishermen to denote the finished net as well as the material of which it was made.

On February 14 they made the first of several trips to the woods above the village to cut stakes for the nets. These stakes were poles about 20 ft. long and 5 in. in diameter at the butt. Many of the old stakes were used, but each year a considerable number of replacements were required to make up for those which were broken or not fit for another season in the water. Seventy-six were needed this year and the diary shows that it took good hard work in the snow and mud to cut them on the ridges and haul them down to the wood roads where they were piled to be loaded onto the cart.

March 25 two of the partners made the first visit of the season to the fish house, taking with them a large stove which they had bought for one dollar. The property was given a thorough examination and the repairs and alterations for the season were planned.

From then on visits to the fish place were continuous and many nights were spent there. The house was put in good order and the bunks were rearranged. This house was standing in my time and I remember it well, —a small neat structure, about 16 x 20, just east of the present Hepburn house.

As soon as the ice would permit, the fish boats were brought around from their winter quarters in the north cove. A cold snap caught one of these, a scow, and it did not get around the first day because of the ice

which had to be broken ahead of it. The second day was calm and it was possible to take the scow out around the breakwater.

From now on every day was filled with petty but necessary tasks. The new twine and what was useable of the old had to be tarred and spread out to dry. If the weather was good, stakes were driven, but there was plenty to do even in the worst weather. The new stakes had to have the bark shaved off with a drawknife and the small end pointed. The railway on which the boats were hauled out by a capstan had to be rebuilt. I believe the posts on which this was set can still be seen at an extra-low tide. All the ropes had to be soaked and then stretched to take the kinks out.

On April 7 the ranges were set. This, undoubtedly, meant setting two posts on the shore by which they could keep a straight line when driving the stakes. Sixteen stakes were driven that day on the inner end of the leader. The next day forty-one were added and the inner leader finished. The stake driver of those days, which was set on the scow, had no engine to operate it. The weight had to be raised by hand each time, so that driving forty-one stakes was a hard and long day's work. Driving could only be done on a fairly calm day when it was possible to hold the driver in position over the stake. These stakes were set a rod and one-half apart so that the inner leader extended over 900 feet from shore. Next was the driving of the heart and the bowl. The twine for these was always set up on shore first so that the arrangement of the stakes could be checked and the twine and tackle fitted so that everything would be correct when the posts were driven in the water.

When the weather was not good enough to allow work on the pounds, there was always a job "pecking" stones. These stones were the anchors at the bottom of the net,—oblong stones from the beach, a foot or so long, but narrow. Around the middle a groove was pecked so that the rope which was attached would not slip off. Many stones were required and the task was admittedly tedious.

All of this was not easy work. The water was still cold and ice formed many mornings in the pond back of the fish house. In 1882 there was a day in May when they all got out their mittens when hauling the traps and driving the team to the Point. It was too cold to work without them.

About the middle of April the results of all this work began to show. One section of the net was completed and a cedar tree and a white painted barrel were put on the outermost stakes to warn off boats. The next day the trap was hauled. The catch was small but even a few fish showed that the run had started. It had taken two months of steady work to get ready for two months of fishing.

From now on the partners lived at the fish house most of the time. The nets were hauled every morning except Sundays, preferably at low tide, and unless there was a great deal to do, some of the crew were able to get home for the afternoon chores and to spend the night. Work began at daybreak and on one occasion when the nets had been badly torn, repairs started at 3:00 A.M. and the crew worked steadily until 7:00 in the evening.

After hauling the net, the fish had to be taken in the team across the new highway bridge to Saybrook Point, where they were delivered to the dealers. The wagon held about 200 fish, and if the catch was more than this, additional trips had to be made. Every day there was something to be done to the pound.

A storm would sometimes loosen a few stakes. An occasional seal, which was then common, would find a tempting net full of fish and proceed to tear it to pieces to get at them. This might mean an all-day job mending the holes, or, more likely, replacing the torn sections with new twine. One day a drifting schooner, becalmed and out of control, took down a section of the net. A high flood in the Connecticut River brought down great quantities of trash, which took two days to clean out. Occasionally, if the net was left untended, some mischievous boys or thieving persons would haul the net and perhaps leave it with all the lines flying loose. Sometimes, when hauling, they were caught by a sudden squall or a rising gale. On one occasion they had to wait for two hours with their boat tied to the outer stakes because they did not dare to attempt a landing amid the waves which had risen while they were working. Another time a northwest gale gave them a hard time getting ashore against it.

The daily catch varied greatly. After the run started, the average catch might be placed at from 300 to 500. Each year there seems to have been one big day, with a catch of over 1,000. When this happened, their rivals up the shore to the west did even better for they reported 2,500. An occasional bit of variety was found worth noting in the diary. For instance, a 16-lb. salmon brought $4.00 from the U. S. engineer working on the breakwater. Two or three sturgeon a year were caught,—one of them seven feet long. They do not say what was done with these but probably they found a market in New York, where the catch for the neighborhood was taken each night by the Hartford boat. The daily entries were stories of hard work, without many exciting incidents, and we soon find June 20 approaching when the legal season ended. The results for the last week or two showed that the run was about ended also.

Then began the reversal of the spring work. The twine was taken ashore and rolled up, the stakes were pulled and piled on the beach, the gear was packed away, and everything which might be stolen was carried back to the homes of the partners at the Point. The time had come to reckon up the results of the season. The catch was 16,011. About 15,000 were salable shad, the balance undersized fish, which were probably eaten locally. The partners met at Mr. Bushnell's house, approved the accounts, and got their money. Tully's share was $425.00. What this meant was interesting to note. The very next day he hitched up his horse and made the rounds, paying off the tax collector, the blacksmith, the coal merchant, the grocerymen, the dry goods stores and any others to whom he owed money, so that he was able to start his spring planting with his debts paid.

Anyone who has seen these accounts and reads of one, two or three thousand shad at a haul, of shipments of from ten to fifteen thousand shad in a single day from Saybrook Point, with two or three hundred men employed, and who stops to realize that this picture covers merely one small spot on the shore, must be conscious of the way in which we have deliberately dissipated a great natural resource by not attempting to preserve our fisheries. In spite of pollution, the experience of wiser communities shows that these fish will continue to exist and reproduce if allowed access to their natural spawning beds. It does not seem too late to install proper fishways in the dams which now block our rivers, in hopes that the dwindling stock will increase.

ROYAL ARMS, CA. 1724

We have just had restored a valuable relic of Connecticut, the Royal Arms, ca. 1724. Mr. Hiram Hoelzer, son of the founder of the firm of C. Fritz Hoelzer of New York, was the expert in charge.

For many years, these arms hung over the Speaker's Chair in the Hall of Representatives. Connecticut saw little violence during the Revolution and it may be that these arms were quietly hidden away in some obscure part of the State House. The first State House was authorized by the General Assembly in 1718 and was occupied in 1719 and 1720. It remained in use until the Bulfinch State House was completed in 1796. This is the present "Old State House" and was located just east of the earlier structure, which was then moved to the rear of Christ Church on Church Street.

Although no record can now be found, it is said that these arms were exhibited in the Rev. Joseph Steward's Museum, later called the Hartford Museum. Steward appeared in Hartford in June 1796 and a year later advertised in *The Connecticut Courant* that "his collection of paintings, and some other natural and artificial curiosities, are exhibited in the East upper space chamber in the State House. . . ."

The Hartford Museum had a phenomenal growth for in 1798 the proprietor claimed that among other things there were three hundred and fifty feet of paintings.

In December 1808, the museum was forced to move from the State House to a new location thirty rods north, opposite the Episcopal Church. Steward died April 23, 1822, but his museum continued for some years thereafter under various proprietors.

Charles Nickerson was the owner in 1825 and Norton's *Register* lists the Hartford Museum at No. 3 Central Row, upstairs. This was a four story building on the corner of Main Street and Central Row in which the museum had four spacious halls; the first about forty-five by twenty-seven feet filled with paintings, the second a gallery of engravings and prints, the third a collection of wax figures, and the fourth, which was fifty-three by twenty-nine feet, was filled with "natural and artificial curiosities".

The full story of the Hartford Museum, the first in the city, is not yet known. It is apparent that a number of objects once in that museum are now the property of this Society. There are other objects which are said to have come from the museum that are now in our possession. One of these later is the Royal Arms. They were reputedly presented to the Society by Lorenzo Bull. We do know that the Arms were the property of the Society as early as April 20, 1840 when they were exhibited at Gilman's Hall at the celebration of the "Historical Society of Connecticut" for the manuscript catalogue of the paintings exhibited records the Arms as being the property of the Society.

The two illustrations clearly show the condition of the canvas before and after treatment and repair and the great care which was taken to preserve what was there without making additions or alterations. In cleaning, the background, which appeared black, turned out to be blue and some replacement was made to give body to the picture. As you can see, the gold leaf of the lion was not replaced, nor were the arms of England and Scotland in the upper left corner of the shield repainted. We know what the arms

Before restoration
Canvas 39 x 35½ inches

of George II should be, but our main interest was in preserving what we had as best we could.

The Royal Arms, as borne by the Hanoverian kings of England until 1801, consisted of a shield divided into four quarters. The first quarter combined the arms of England and Scotland, one half having three gold lions on a red ground for England, and the other a gold ground with a red lion rampant within an ornate red border for Scotland. The second quarter bore the arms of France, three gold fleur-de-lys on a blue ground. In early days, a sovereign who wished to assert his claim to a kingdom placed its arms upon his shield, which was done by King Edward III who claimed he was King of France in right of his mother Isabel, daughter of Philip V.

The third quarter displayed the arms of Ireland, a blue ground on which is a gold harp with silver strings. George I was Elector of Hanover before his accession to the English throne, so the Hanoverian arms composed the fourth quarter of the shield as follows: red ground with two gold lions, for Brunswick; a gold ground with a blue lion rampant surrounded by red hearts, for Luneburg; a red ground with a silver horse running, for Westphalia and

After restoration

over all, for the Electoral dignity, the crown of Charlemagne in gold on a red ground.

The shield is encircled by the Garter, a riband of blue bearing in gold the French inscription "HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE" ("Dishonored be him who thinks evil of it"). This is the highest order of English chivalry and was founded by King Edward III some six hundred years ago. The traditional and most romantic version of its founding is that Joan, Countess of Salisbury, lost her garter while dancing in a solemn ball and the king picked it up from the ground. Some of his nobles laughed, thinking it a love token, but the king, turning to them, replied in French "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense" adding that they would shortly see that garter advanced to so high an honor that they would be happy to wear it.

Above the shield is a royal crown surmounted by a helmet, which in heraldry indicated the rank of the wearer. The sovereign and royal family bore the helmet full faced, with six bars, all of gold. Above the helmet is another crown surmounted by a gold lion, also crowned. On either side is the mantelling, so named from the cloaks worn by knights, of ermine and gold.

The lion was introduced into the English coat of arms by Henry I and Richard the Lion Heart. It appears as the dexter (or right hand) supporter of the shield, while on the sinister (or left hand) is a silver unicorn with gold horn, mane and tail and wearing around its neck a gold coronet with a long gold chain. The unicorn was a legendary medieval beast and abounds in Scottish heraldry. It was made the sinister supporter of the arms by King James I.

At the foot of the unicorn may be seen the Scottish thistle, and on the other side the English rose, which is a reminder of the bloody War of the Roses when the houses of Lancaster and York disputed each other's claim to the throne. Peace was not restored until Henry VII, a descendant of the Duke of Lancaster, married Elizabeth of York, a daughter of Edward IV.

Underneath the whole is a scroll bearing the motto "DIEU ET MON DROIT" (God and My Right).

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

The final reception of the year was held on April 15th with a special exhibition of Bennington Pottery. This collection was gathered by William J. Hickmott and his son, the late William J. Hickmott, Jr. and was bequeathed to the Suffield Historical Society. Until such time as that Society can safely store them, the collection will remain here.

The Society has been plagued in recent years by storms on meeting days, and this jinx continues with the exhibition schedule. In January, sixty-five members and friends braved a snow storm to view the tin exhibit. In March, more than ninety came out in a driving rain (that leaked into the bowl of flowers which graced the tea table) to see Mr. Brainard's models of antique furniture, and seventy were not deterred by a day-long rain on April 15th to view the pottery exhibition.

The Lecture Hall is meeting with a splendid response on the part of outside groups and meetings are now being scheduled well into 1953. With seats for eighty, slide projection equipment, light refreshment facilities and an advantageous location, it is expected the hall will be used continually in the future. A modest charge is made for evening use when a staff member is required on over-time duty, but interested persons and groups are urged to make early reservations. Some organizations are reserving for all their meetings on a regular schedule.

During March, more than 800 persons used the building. At the regular monthly meeting, 85 members and friends heard Albert Sack of New York, speak on "Fine Points of Furniture." The before-mentioned reception drew 90 persons, the Numismatic Society had 30, the Horticultural Society brought 36 and the Windsor Historical Society had 60. In addition, there were 253 readers in the Reading Room and 233 were guided through the Museum.

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.